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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 002435

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SP](#)
SUBJECT: SPAIN: SIX MONTHS ON, ETA'S "PERMANENT CEASEFIRE"
ON SHAKY GROUND

REF: A. MADRID 1709
[1](#)B. MADRID 2073

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Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Six months after the Basque separatist group ETA announced a permanent ceasefire, many inside Spain are now doubting its permanence. Street violence and vandalism continue in the Basque region and alleged ETA supporters released a statement over the weekend claiming that the group would refuse to disarm until the region gains its independence. Spanish newspapers have reported in recent days that ETA might reconsider its ceasefire agreement if the government fails to make significant progress toward the legalization of its outlawed political wing, and Interior Minister Rubalcaba announced earlier this week that talks between the government and ETA had been postponed indefinitely. Post sees the potential for a hiatus, if not a complete breakdown, in the GOS peace process with ETA as each side remains intransigent, and forging some type of middle ground does not at the moment appear possible. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) The Basque region was hit with its fourth straight weekend of "kale borroka," or street violence perpetrated by young ETA supporters, and recent acts of vandalism have included attacks on a radio station in Pamplona and a nearby headquarters of the Basque Socialist Party. Adding to the tension, on September 23 three masked figures claiming to represent ETA read a statement saying that ETA's fight was, "not past, but rather present and future." If genuine, the message would be the most threatening released by ETA since their announcement of a permanent ceasefire in March. President Zapatero responded a day after the statement's release that his government would hold firm in the management of the peace process, but Interior Minister Rubalcaba informed parliament on September 26 that a meeting with ETA planned for this month would be postponed indefinitely. Spanish newspapers have recently reported that ETA might reconsider its ceasefire agreement if the government fails to make significant advances toward the legalization of its outlawed political wing Batasuna, and rumors are circulating that ETA may take some sort of action, be it an ultimatum or an outright return to violence intended to force the government's hand, around the middle of October.

[1](#)3. (C) Post sees the potential over the coming weeks for a hiatus, if not a complete breakdown, in the GOS peace process with ETA. As reported in REFTEL A, President Zapatero announced in late June that he would launch direct negotiations with ETA--as the group had in his opinion followed through with its declaration of a permanent ceasefire--and that Minister Rubalcaba would brief political leaders in September regarding the progress of the

negotiations. Talks have not materialized, primarily because the two sides have yet to find common ground on the "Law of Political Parties" that was enacted in 2002 by the two main Spanish political parties to ban ETA front group Batasuna from the political process for its refusal to renounce terrorism. Zapatero insisted that Batasuna change its name and party statutes in order to meet legal requirements, steps that Batasuna continues to reject. ETA radicals and Batasuna political operatives have expressed frustration lately with the lack of progress they believe the government has made in addressing their concerns and charge that the government is trying to indefinitely delay political negotiations involving the legal status of Batasuna. Batasuna insists that it has kept its side of the bargain by respecting the ceasefire, and criticizes the government for continuing to arrest and try suspected ETA members while not lifting the ban on political participation by Batasuna.

14. (U) The government for its part is holding firm to what it believes was agreed upon previously, namely that only a Batasuna that respected democratic procedures would be allowed to participate in the peace process, and that ETA would limit itself in negotiations to its disarmament and dissolution. Zapatero insists that the government does not intend to modify its firm stance on ending ETA violence, and that the rules of the game are clear. GOS officials remain publicly optimistic that there is room for agreement and have urged Spaniards to be patient as the process moves along and not focus too heavily on the continuing street violence. Our contacts indicate that privately, however, officials in Zapatero's government no longer believe that these messages are meant for internal ETA consumption and are wondering whether ETA hard-liners have won the day.

15. (C) Poloff spoke with Basque journalist Oscar Beltran, who covers ETA terrorism for the leading regional daily "El Correo," to request his assessment of recent tensions in the

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peace process. Beltran opined that legalization of Batasuna under another name was no longer sufficient for radical Basque nationalists, as their objective is now the complete revocation of the "Law of Political Parties." Beltran said that the Zapatero government had the votes to overturn the law, but that the political price of doing so would be extremely high. Zapatero's options were therefore limited to either an all-out conflict with ETA, or the ceding to key ETA demands on political recognition and territorial ambitions. Beltran described rumors currently circulating in the Basque region that ETA would take "important measures" during October that would leave clear whether or not the group intended to hold to the ceasefire and peace process. He said ETA was not fully in control of its base, and gave as an example the inability of the leadership to halt a hunger strike by imprisoned ETA terrorist Juan de Chaos that could inflame die-hard ETA fighters and undermine the group's willingness to negotiate.

16. (C) Comment: As the ceasefire negotiations enter their seventh month, misperceptions, diverging tactics, ambiguities and distortions threaten to unravel the fledgling process. Each side has been boxed into a corner by its own actions and/or pressure from opposing forces, and the middle ground does not at the moment appear sustainable. Batasuna leaders sold the peace process to its more radical supporters as the only viable entry ramp into political negotiations, but as the government stalls on the question of legalization, these supporters are becoming increasingly disenchanted and agitated and are hinting at reconsidering a return to violence. The Zapatero government's maneuvering room has been limited by constant attacks and criticism from ETA victims organizations and the opposition Popular Party (which has been vehemently opposed to Zapatero's ETA peace initiative at a time when ETA was practically eliminated by cooperation between Spanish and French police forces). It is important to note that ETA supporters have been saying for

over a month that the ceasefire declaration has been in crisis (as reported in REFTEL B), and they have threatened to respond in the past. What is unclear, however, is just if and when ETA's patience with the peace process will eventually run out.

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS IN THE ETA PEACE PROCESS (2006)

March 22 - ETA declares "Permanent Ceasefire"

March 23 - Ceasefire takes effect

May 21 - Zapatero says he will announce in June the start of direct talks with ETA

June 26 - Zapatero announces that he will begin "long and difficult" peace talks with ETA

August 18 - ETA claims peace process "immersed in an obvious state of crisis"

September 23 - Alleged ETA gunmen announce refusal to disarm until the region gains its independence

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